

AMENDMENTS TO THE CLAIMS

Claims 1 - 352 (Cancelled).

c' 9/20/03 353. (Previously added) A method for producing meat having a proportional fat content, comprising:

providing at least a first and second stream of meat having at least fat;
treating at least the first and second streams with a bacteria-reducing agent;
measuring at least the fat content of the first and second streams;
transferring a controlled amount of the first and second streams to a vessel having a selected gas;
blending the first and second streams in the vessel to provide a blended stream of proportional fat content;
transferring the blended stream into a barrier package;
removing oxygen from the package;
sealing the package to contain the meat and gas with a free oxygen level lower than the oxygen level of air; and
testing the meat for the presence of bacteria.

354. (Previously added) The method of Claim 353, wherein the package contains legally required information.

355. (Previously added) The method of Claim 353, wherein the quantity of free oxygen, including oxygen that may be derived from the reduction of oxymyoglobin in meat in the sealed package, does not exceed 1,500 ppm.

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ck 356. (Previously added) The method of Claim 353, wherein the bacteria-reducing agent includes a measured amount of water, wherein the measured water replaces water evaporated from the meat.

357. (Previously added) The method of Claim 353, wherein the package is a chub package.

358. (Previously added) The method of Claim 353, wherein the package is a case-ready modified-atmosphere package.

359. (Previously added) The method of Claim 353, wherein the bacteria is *E. coli*.

C 360. (Previously added) A method for processing meat primals, comprising:

obtaining meat primals having at least fat and water;

reducing the bacteria on the meat primals;

transferring the meat primals to containers;

removing oxygen from the containers;

sealing the containers;

storing the containers;

removing the primals from the containers and cutting the primals to provide primal portions;

placing the primal portions into barrier packages;

introducing a gas into the package;

sealing the packages; and

testing the meat for the presence of bacteria.

361. (Previously added) The method of Claim 360, wherein the packages contain legally required information.

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362. (Previously added) The method of Claim 360, wherein the gas has oxygen in proportions higher than the proportion of oxygen in air.

363. (Previously added) The method of Claim 360, wherein the gas has oxygen in proportions lower than the proportion of oxygen in air.

364. (Previously added) The method of Claim 360, wherein the bacteria is *E. coli*.

365. (Previously added) The method of Claim 360, wherein testing is done in the package.

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366. (Previously added) A method for producing ground meat, comprising:
grinding meat to provide ground meat;
exposing ground meat to a gas that inhibits bacterial growth;
transferring the ground meat to a web of barrier material;
sealing the web to enclose the ground meat in an atmosphere having an oxygen level lower than the oxygen level of air;
testing the ground meat for the presence of bacteria; and
applying indicia to the web, wherein the indicia includes information related to the ground meat.

367. (Previously added) The method of Claim 366, wherein the meat is ground in a gas having an oxygen content lower than the oxygen content of air, and the quantity of oxygen in the sealed web is not more than 500 ppm.

368. (Previously added) The method of Claim 366, wherein the bacteria is *E. coli*.

369. (Previously added) A method for producing a meat product, comprising:
harvesting meat composed of several components having a variable relative ratio, including at least fat, muscle, and water, wherein the ratio of at least one component is determined;

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treating the meat with an agent including water that inhibits the growth of bacteria;

grouping the meat into quantities according to at least one variable component;
combining quantities of meat according to at least one of the variable components
to provide a meat product with a combined quantity of at least one variable;

determining the proportion of water in the meat product;
enclosing the meat product within a packaging material to provide a packaged meat product;

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testing the meat for the presence of bacteria; and
applying information to the package, including legally required information relating to the packaged meat product.

370. (Previously added) The method of Claim 369, wherein the agent is acidic.

371. (Previously added) The method of Claim 369, wherein the agent comprises carbonic acid.

372. (Previously added) The method of Claim 369, wherein the package provides recesses to contain liquids that may escape from the meat.

373. (Previously added) The method of Claim 369, wherein the bacteria is *E. coli*.

Claims 374-421 (Canceled).

422. (New) A method for packaging retail packages of meat, comprising:

obtaining meat primal portions;
transferring the primal meat portions to retail packaging trays;
transferring the retail packaging trays to barrier containers;
introducing a blend of gases to the barrier containers, wherein said gases include carbon monoxide; and

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sealing the barrier containers with retail packaging trays and meat therein.

423. (New) The method of Claim 422, further comprising reducing the bacteria on the meat primals.

424. (New) The method of Claim 423, further comprising testing the meat for the presence of bacteria.

425. (New) The method of Claim 422, further comprising removing oxygen from the barrier containers.

426. (New) The method of Claim 425, further comprising storing the barrier containers.

C1 427. (New) The method of Claim 367, wherein the gas contains carbon dioxide, carbon monoxide, nitrogen, oxygen, or any combination thereof.

428. (New) A method for processing and packaging meat, comprising:
harvesting meat composed of several components having a variable relative ratio, including at least fat, muscle, and water, wherein the ratio of at least one component is determined;

grouping the meat into quantities according to at least one variable component;

combining quantities of meat according to at least one of the variable components to provide a meat product with a combined quantity of at least one variable;

determining the proportion of water in the meat product;

enclosing the meat product with a selected gas within a packaging material to provide a packaged meat product;

testing the meat for the presence of bacteria; and

applying information to the package, including legally required information relating to the packaged meat product.

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429. (New) The method of Claim 428, wherein the selected gas contains an amount of carbon monoxide.

430. (New) A method for processing and packaging meat, comprising:
combining a first quantity of meat obtained from a first country with a second quantity of meat obtained from a second country, wherein one of said quantities of meat has been treated with a bacteria-reducing agent and an amount of water to provide a controlled amount of added water in the combined meat.

431. (New) The method of Claim 430, further comprising combining the first and second quantities of meat in proportions according to at least one variable in at least one of the selected quantities to provide proportioned meat.

432. (New) The method of Claim 431, further comprising transferring the proportioned meat into an enclosed conduit.

433. (New) The method of Claim 432, further comprising testing the meat for the presence of bacteria.

434. (New) The method of Claim 433, further comprising transferring the proportioned meat into packaging.

435. (New) The method of Claim 434, wherein the packaging comprises a barrier package containing a selected gas.

436. (New) The method of Claim 435, wherein the selected gas includes a measured amount of carbon monoxide.

437. (New) The method of Claim 433, wherein the bacteria is *E. coli*.

438. (New) A method for producing meat, comprising:

transferring a first stream of meat having at least one variable to a first device capable of measuring at least one variable;

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conf transferring a second stream of meat having at least one variable to a second device capable of measuring at least one variable; and

combining the first and second streams of meat, wherein the first and second streams of meat have been in contact with a gas that has an oxygen content different from the oxygen content of air.

439. (New) A method for producing meat, comprising:

cl transferring a first stream of meat having at least one variable to a first device capable of measuring at least one variable;

transferring a second stream of meat having at least one variable to a second device capable of measuring at least one variable; and

combining the first and second streams of meat, wherein combining takes place in the presence of a gas that has an oxygen content different from the oxygen content of air.